Retreats . . .

in times
of silence
with God

By the Right Reverend Arthur Michael Ramsey, D.D.

AS CHRISTIAN PEOPLE we belong to a noisy and busy world and are caught up in a stream of constant activity. So busy are we, and often so noisy, that it is hard for us to have the quietness in which our souls can dwell upon the reality of God and of our relation to Him. Our need is twofold—for *quiet* in contrast to noise, and for *inactivity* in contrast to the flux of daily duties. To put it differently, we need to break with the complexities of our temporal life in order to have touch with the things that are eternal. "Be *still* and know that I am GOD."

Silence with God

A Retreat is a time of silence, with God. The silence is supremely important. At first it seems queer and selfconscious, but as it goes on, the deep, unselfconscious peace of it is realized. It is a great mistake to try to make things "easier" at a Retreat by allowing talk at certain times: this makes it not easier, but harder for the retreatants to enter into the spirit of deep silence and to come to enjoy it.

Rest with God

A Retreat is a time of rest. Its note at the outset is one of peace and relaxation. But it is rest not towards self, but towards God. The addresses given by the conductor

and the acts of worship at intervals in the day help our imagination to be drawn towards God. The awareness comes to us of His greatness, His goodness, His providential ruling of our lives, His purpose for us. Unselfconsciously, in peace and in freedom, we are led to realize God more deeply and to make acts of gratitude, love, penitence and resolve towards Him.

Peace and Freedom

It is a great mistake to suppose that a Retreat is a sort of "hothouse" of enforced spiritual exercises. Its keynote is peace and freedom. Equally is it a mistake to think of it as something meant for specially pious or spiritually-minded people. It is for the ordinary Christian, and ordinary Christians are being more and more led to find in the practice of Retreat a way of realizing more deeply the meaning of their calling.

The Need for Retreats

The Church as a whole in these days urgently needs more of the spirit of Retreat. Our activities as a Church multiply—but has there been a commensurate deepening in that quiet waiting upon God of which the Bible says so much? There is an old saying that it is the role of the Christian teacher *contemplare, et contemplata aliis tradere,* "to contemplate and to pass on to

others the things contemplated." If we neglect the first, how shall we effectively do the second?

Priests who make an annual Retreat gain untold benefit for themselves and their people. Parishes which have a weekend Retreat from time to time for some of the congregation have that deeper realization of God from which things unpredictable may follow.

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